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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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TO

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FROM

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Department of State

MEXICO, SAN SALVADOR, MANAGUA, TEGUCIGALPA,
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Amembassy GUATEMALA

DATE: December 7, 1976

Monthly Report on Political Violence and Human
Rights: October 1976

SUMMARY: The number of incidents of probable political violence fell sharply in October to 15, the lowest number since February 1976. However, one of these incidents involved the murder of a large landowner in Escuintla by the long-dormant action arm of the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT).

In an incident which, although not politically motivated, clearly demonstrates the violent nature of Guatemalan society, a senior member of one of Guatemala's most prominent families participated in the killing or wounding of three members of another prominent family in a quarrel in a public restaurant. In a new twist to the Castellanos story, a letter was received from an alleged member of the group that kidnapped Maria Olga Novella, claiming that Castellanos was alive and well in Mexico living off the ransom money. Amnesty International cites the Castellanos kidnapping in a July report on Guatemala but comes to an erroneous conclusion. END SUMMARY.

Following the pattern of the past six months of substantial differences from month to month in the number of press-reported incidents of probable political violence, the number of incidents fell sharply from 41 in September to only 15 in October, the lowest figure since December 1975, except for the earthquake month of February 1976. The 15 incidents included 12 killings, one kidnapping, and two incidents of people surviving attacks after apparently having been left for dead. The predominant geographical pattern continued with almost half of the incidents, 7, occurring on the south

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coast, including the coastal section of Quezaltenango Department. Of the other eight incidents four occurred in Guatemala City, two in Jutiapa, one in Chiquimula, and one in El Quiché.

PGT Kills Two

Detracting from the improved monthly statistics was the killing by the PGT of two prominent landowners on the south coast, one of whom was killed in early November and will be included in the November statistics.

It is possible, if not probable, that the PGT has been forced by EGP successes to become more active itself or risk losing some more of its more militant members to the guerrilla organization.

Shootout at the Pescador

On October 24 a non-political incident occurred which, while not directly pertinent to this report, demonstrates how easily Guatemalans resort to firearms to resolve petty disputes and how dangerous can be the common practice among prominent businessmen and politicians of using bodyguards.

According to press reports, Jorge Kong Vielman, a senior member of the Kong family which owns inter alia the CODESA cottonseed processing plant in Escuintla, the scene this year of a bitter labor dispute, and the Sheraton Conquistador Hotel (see Guatemala 7620 for a report on the bombing of this hotel), was having lunch at the Pescador Restaurant near the Embassy with his family. At a nearby table three young brothers of another prominent family were also eating and allegedly using foul language in their conversation. Kong complained about their language and an argument ensued. Kong then pulled his gun and wounded one of the brothers. His two bodyguards who had been waiting outside rushed in and killed the other two brothers, all of whom had been unarmed.

The murders have created a sensation in Guatemala. While Kong and his bodyguards have been arrested and charged with murder, it remains to be seen how severe a sentence, if any, the politically influential Kong receives.

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Kong's bodyguards were members of the Mobile Military Police (PMA) who had been hired by Kong. This is a common procedure here and completely legal, although since the killings it has come in for some close examination in the press. Possibly to capitalize on the bad publicity the PMA has received from the incident, two members of the PMA in Guatemala City were gunned down and their weapons stolen in November, possibly by the EGP.

Castellanos Ordeal

The Castellanos case took a new turn in October when the Association of Guatemalan Students (AEU), which has publicly supported the Castellanos family, announced it had received a letter from a man who wrote that he had participated in the kidnapping of Maria Olga Novella (see Guatemala A-63). The man claimed he was cheated out of his share of the reward by the other kidnappers, the Lobos Dubon brothers and Castellanos, who he said are now living well off the reward money in Europe and Mexico, respectively. The "embittered" kidnapper threatened to reveal more information if the publicity given to the Castellanos case does not stop and closed the letter with "my best wishes for your total destruction..." The letter has been taken as a death threat against "Open Studio", a television news program that has been reading on the air the Castellanos open letters to President Laugerud. In one of their letters, which reached number 22 in October, the family accused the Corps of Detectives of having written the letter to the AEU.

[REDACTED]

Of interest as well is the fact that this is the first time that Castellanos has been publicly linked to the Novella kidnapping.

Amnesty International

In a July, 1976 report Amnesty International says that there must be a connection between the appearance in mid-May of a leaflet threatening the life of a "Mario Castellanos" in Escuintla and the disappearance of a "Mario Castellanos" some 10 days later in Guatemala City. AI suggests that there may

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have been a case of mistaken identity in that those who threatened the Escuintla Castellanos may have mistakenly kidnapped the Guatemala City Castellanos. In fact, however, there is no connection. The Mario Castellanos who is threatened in the leaflet is finance secretary of an Escuintla labor federation and he and two other labor leaders were threatened (but not harmed) because of a local labor dispute. [REDACTED] B / ED

The same report also cites the kidnapping by some alleged detectives of Sergio Rene Bertrand on May 14 in Guatemala City. However, except for having included the incident in its May statistics, the Embassy has no further information on the case.

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